

PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES OF NOVEMBER 14, 2005

2005-0023 - City of Sunnyvale Study Issue – Historic Murphy Avenue Revitalization Project. Study to consider the adoption of the S. Murphy Avenue Streetscape Revitalization Design Plan – SL

Steve Lynch, Associate Planner, presented the staff report. He said that this issue was the number one ranked study issue for the Community Development Department for 2005. The report was recently presented at the Heritage Preservation Commission meeting resulting in the recommendation to approve the preferred plan with conditions. The most significant issue they recommended was that the style of benches, light posts, fountains, etc. should all be consistent in one style from one era history. Mr. Lynch said that the City has retained the consultant services of Royston, Hanamota, Alley and Abey and that **Mr. Aditya Advani**, a Principal at the firm was present to provide the details of the report.

Aditya Advani explained the proposed details for the streetscape. He said a series of public meetings were held to receive public input. He said that the plans are not just for Murphy Avenue, but that this project provides an opportunity to improve the whole historic district, including consideration of the Caltrain station and the future mall. They began looking at the district from the outside. There are several elements involved. The main element is to link the district on the outside involving the parking lots with low walls to hide the parked cars, styled with a theme of history. Other details include, light poles, banners, a gateway, and improved parking lots. The plan is a flexible plan using street markings with pavers, markings in the paving, and a uniform “carpet” that joins the two edges of the street. The plan is pedestrian friendly and useable, brings in more color and reduces clutter by organizing the street furnishings.

Mr. Lynch continued that there is also an important policy included in the preferred Design Plan that addresses the flexibility of the streetscape furniture and the non-moving portion of the sidewalks. The Study Issue recommends two portions of the policy, the first is an interim policy that addresses the existing furniture that is on Murphy Avenue and the second is the permanent policy after some of the designs are implemented. Staff is recommending approval of the preferred Design Plan and that the City pursue the \$3 million grant money from the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC).

Comm. Simons asked about the pedestrian promenades in back of the businesses on Murphy Avenue and if there was any intention to restrict the back area usage. Mr. Advani said that he suggests flexible usage, but would defer to staff.

Comm. Sulser referred to the Project Implementation Cost Estimates on page 11 of the report and asked about the three different project levels and how staff determined what items went under the three levels. Mr. Lynch said they were prioritized and that the reclamation of the land and sidewalk revitalization is the highest priority. Mr. Advani said that Project Level One buys the design without the ground plane being improved. Improvements would continue to move forward based on the funding.

Comm. Babcock asked what the rationale was for fencing in the parking lot. Mr. Advani said he feels the edges of the district bleed out. This would be an element to demark the district area. Secondly the wall visually hides the cars. Comm. Babcock suggested a low seating wall rather than a fence. Mr. Advani said the wall is about three feet tall. **Trudi Ryan**, Planning Officer, said that this is not one continuous wall and there are breaks to walk through. Mr. Lynch clarified that the wall is intended for seating and is about 20" high with iron work that is higher and serves as the seating back. Comm. Babcock said she wants Murphy Avenue to be part of downtown and not in a box. She also asked about the benches and how the location for the bench is determined. Mr. Lynch said the final placement will be determined in the implementation phase and said there would be 22 to 31 benches. Comm. Babcock asked if a business does not want a bench, do they have the right to refuse a bench. Mr. Lynch said yes. Comm. Babcock asked about the restaurant "outdoor eating corrals" and if this would be part of the plan. Mr. Lynch said the "corrals" are required by law if liquor is served. He added that each business will have a two-foot area directly in front of their business to use for various approved displays.

Comm. Klein asked for clarification on staff recommendations and the project in regards to the funding. He asked what the projected time frame (more specific than 2006) is for the application to MTC for the \$3 million grant and what the plan is if the City does not get the grant. Ms. Ryan said generally the MTC grants are announced towards the end of the year. She said she anticipates the application to be submitted within the next few months with a response before the end of 2006. She said if the City does not receive the grant that the City could reapply, and staff could come back to the City Council for direction. She said that the \$955,000 is City money that has been set aside and the Council could direct staff to implement a portion of the plan using only City funds. Comm. Klein and staff further discussed possible funding scenarios.

Vice Chair Fussell asked about the outdoor eating corrals and commented that two feet does not seem to be big enough. Mr. Lynch said that two feet is the target. Ms. Ryan added that there is an existing outdoor dining policy for Murphy Avenue and that restaurants can apply for outdoor dining permits that allow them more space than the two foot area. She commented that the two feet allows other non-restaurant businesses equal street space in front of their businesses.

Comm. Simons recommended that the MTC grant application be consistent with the VTA pedestrian guidelines as MTC would be using that as a reference for Santa Clara County and would help the grant process. Ms. Ryan said that this recommendation can be added to a motion and commented that the Council has already officially supported those guidelines.

Comm. Sulser asked if there is a downside to pursuing the grant. Ms. Ryan said it will require staff time to prepare, but that the amount of the grant is a good tradeoff.

Chair Hungerford asked for staff to provide a brief overview of the financing. Mr. Lynch said the City has approximately \$955,000 earmarked towards improvement of Murphy Avenue. Staff thinks that the City is in a good position with MTC to possibly get \$2 to \$3 million. Staff thinks the \$3 million level is a realistic goal with the overall Murphy Street vision being about \$10 million to complete the improvements. Ms. Ryan added that the grant funding the City is looking at is called "Transportation for Liveable Communities," and commented that the current effort is being funded with the help of a TLC Planning grant.

Chair Hungerford opened the Public Hearing.

Dr. Gary Gold, a Sunnyvale Avenue property owner, expressed his opinion about jay walking from the parking lots between Evelyn and Washington Street. He said there is a crosswalk at Sunnyvale Avenue and Washington, a crosswalk at Sunnyvale Avenue and Evelyn, but there is no crosswalk in between and they bound two major parking areas. He would like to see a crosswalk added somewhere in the middle of the existing crosswalks on Sunnyvale Avenue.

Comm. Simons asked if the fencing around parking lots would close off pedestrians from being able to cross Sunnyvale Avenue at the location Dr. Gold is concerned about. Mr. Lynch said no as there are multiple breaks in the parking lot fencing. Ms. Ryan referred to page 6 of Attachment C of the Design Plan and said that this shows the sectioned areas. She said this portion of Sunnyvale Avenue is an area of concern to the City's Traffic and Transportation staff. Comm. Simons asked if the Commission could suggest that this area be evaluated to determine if a safe mid-block crossing was possible. Ms. Ryan said this could be suggested in a motion.

Joe Antuzzi, Chairman of the Sunnyvale Downtown Association and owner of Il Postale Restaurant on Washington Street, said that the merchants have been involved with the meetings with the consultants and the designer and are very excited about the possibility of upgrading Murphy Avenue. They would like to see the Murphy Avenue upgrades done by the time the mall opens to show residents, merchants and shoppers that Sunnyvale is new and that the mall and Murphy Avenue areas are integrated. If the design of the mall and Murphy

Avenue coincide with each other it will help eradicate the fear of the merchants that the new mall could be a barrier to the Murphy Avenue area. He also recommended that the back parking lot areas be designed with some type of uniform trash and recycling area. He said the consultants and designers have done a great job and the merchants are excited to see the upgrades.

Comm. Babcock asked what the merchants' responses are to the perimeter parking lot fences. Mr. Antuzzi said he does not see the proposed structures as fences, but that they are more of a way to visually break up the parking lot. He also commented that with budget cutbacks that Murphy Avenue has become an embarrassment due to reduced clean up and encouraged the Commission to consider in the maintenance of Murphy Avenue in the planning.

Art Schwartz, a Sunnyvale resident, said that the fencing of the parking lots will be good as it will visually reduce the view of the parked cars. He said there is a constant problem driving into the parking lot on the Frances Avenue side and suggested that the central line of parking spaces be closed and parking be continuous through that point so that all the cars entering from Frances Avenue would have to turn right with an exit road onto Evelyn. Other than the parking lot on Frances Avenue, he said this is a great plan.

Mike Johnson, new Executive Director of the Downtown Association, said he has attended the revitalization meetings and that a lot of the merchants are very excited about the new opportunities that are emerging with the new transition with the Downtown Association merging with the new mall. He reiterated that there are concerns with the current state of affairs Downtown and that the conditions on Murphy Avenue are probably not the representation that the City or residents have for Murphy Avenue. He said that the Downtown Association is in 100% support of the proposal being submitted and hopes to see it move forward with the grant funding. The merchants are excited and the Association will work with the City in any way they can.

Harriet Rowe, a Sunnyvale resident, said that this is an exciting looking plan. She said the only problem she has is with the design of the gateway and that it needs to have a little something added. She said this has been discussed with the other gateways development going on and that the two groups may need to get together and find a central theme for the gateways.

Ms. Ryan commented that the design features in the plan are really just placeholders and the gateway feature is just an indicator of where it might be located. She said that the community will have additional opportunity in the future to review the design and provide input.

Comm. Klein asked staff about the garbage issue that was also brought up by Mr. Antuzzi. He said that there is no mention in the proposal of how this would be handled in the long-term plan. Mr. Lynch said that there are enclosures in the

parking lots that are currently City-owned trash enclosures. He said that staff looked at providing just one large trash enclosure, but that the Solid Waste division advised against it. Ms. Ryan said there are several issues to be considered including adequate number of spaces for businesses, the frequency of pickups and the aesthetics of the actual facility.

Chair Hungerford commented that he was recently in a different community and that dumpsters were mixed in with the pedestrian walkways and it did not work very well.

Chair Hungerford closed the Public Hearing.

Comm. Simons made a motion for Alternative 1 with modifications; to place a requirement that includes the seating for the perimeter parking wall to be set at the most appropriate height for civic seating; the grant proposal shall include reference to the Valley Transportation Authority Pedestrian Guidelines; look into the possible ways of handling a safe crosswalk on Sunnyvale Avenue that crosses the two parking areas near Evelyn; make the pedestrian walkways useable when there are enclosures. Comm. Klein seconded, and reworded the trash recommendation to read "have staff investigate the usage of aesthetics and enclosures to both remove the nuisance of the garbage and provide easy accessibility for pickup and that it not impede pedestrian traffic."

Comm. Moylan clarified that this motion is actually Alternative 3. Comm. Moylan said he will be supporting the motion.

Comm. Simons said that this is a very positive project and that the potential that the City might be able to have outside funding for a City project is very exciting. He said he supports the grant proposal.

Comm. Klein said he often walks down Murphy Avenue and sees the need for improvement. He said he hopes staff can determine soon if the external funds will be available and if not, that Council will approve the funding right away for the first level of the project. He looks forward to this project bettering the business and Downtown environment.

Final Action:

Comm. Simons made a motion on 2005-0023 to: A. approve the preferred Design Plan with modifications, B. Pursue a grant from Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) in 2006 for an approximate \$3 million project, C. Develop a policy regarding new public seating and the non-moving portion of the sidewalk for Council's further consideration, D. Draft a News Rack Special District Study Issue for 2006, and E. Draft an interim policy on moving street furniture on Murphy Avenue. Modifications include; to place a requirement that includes the seating for the perimeter parking wall to be set at the most appropriate height for civic seating; the grant proposal shall include reference to the Valley Transportation Authority Pedestrian Guidelines; look into the possible ways of handling a safe crosswalk on Sunnyvale Avenue that crosses the two parking areas near Evelyn; have staff investigate the usage of aesthetics and enclosures to both remove the nuisance of the garbage and provide easy accessibility for pickup and that it not impede pedestrian traffic. Comm. Klein seconded.

Motion carried unanimously, 7-0.

This item is scheduled to go to City Council on November 22, 2005.